

Some Highlights of the Evolution of the Incident Command System
As Developed by FIREScope

Timelines

1970

During a 13 day period, 16 lives were lost, 700 structures were destroyed, and over one-half million acres were burned in California. Although all agencies cooperated to the best of their ability, numerous problems of communication and coordination hampered their effectiveness.

1971

The 92nd Congress approved funding for the U. S. Forest Service Research to design a system that will “Make a quantum jump in the capabilities of Southern California wildland fire protection agencies to effectively coordinate interagency action and to allocate suppression resources in dynamic, multiple-fire situations.” This system became known as FIREScope, (Firefighting Resources Organized for Potential Emergencies).

1972

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, Los Angeles, Ventura and the Santa Barbara County Fire Departments and the Los Angeles City Fire Department joined with the U.S. Forest Service in the joint development of the systems that are FIREScope.

1973

The first “FIREScope Technical Team” was established to guide the research and development design. The two major components to come out of this work are the Incident Command System (ICS) and the Multi Agency Coordination System (MACS).

1974

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was chartered to coordinate fire management programs of the various participating Federal and State agencies. Nationally, many agencies used the Large Fire Organization (LFO) as the model for wildland fire organization and management.

1976

The FIREScope agencies formally agree on ICS common terminology and procedures. Limited field-testing is conducted.

1978

Parts of the ICS were successfully used on several wildland fire incidents and applied to urban firefighting.

ICS formally adopted by the Los Angeles Fire Department. Concept of MACS approved.

1980

ICS formally adopted by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), partner agencies and endorsed by the State Board of Fire Services.

The FIREScope ICS training course development now under way will eventually satisfy the needs of State and Federal agencies. In fact, the training development effort will in all likelihood meet the needs of NIIMS. Thus, the FIREScope Program training effort will have served to not only meet the local needs but also those of the national user.

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) performs an analysis of FIREScope ICS for possible national application.

1981

ICS in wide use throughout Southern California by major fire agencies. Use on non-fire incidents increasing.

CDF, OES and the California State Fire Marshal all sign a "Statement of Intent" establishing a mutual commitment to support the FIREScope Program.

The FIREScope Board of Directors approves a response to NWCG, which generally supported the national adoption of a uniform emergency management organization. This organizational structure, referred to, as "NIIMS" is basically the FIREScope ICS.

NWCG accepts the recommendation for developing the ICS for national application.

U.S. Forest Service approves Region 5 ICS implementation by 1983, and service wide use by 1985.

1982

All FIREScope ICS documentation is revised to National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS) terminology and organization.

Other General FIREScope ICS Information

"The two major components of FIREScope (the Incident Command System and the Multi Agency Coordination System) were originally intended to meet fire emergency needs. As they were developed, however, they were tailored to meet

“fire service needs”, i.e. those types of incidents that fire agencies must respond to. This came to be termed “all-hazard” or “all-risk” and includes a wide spectrum of emergencies (plane crashes, hazardous materials accidents, earthquake, etc). This “all-hazards” capability has been initially structured into the present systems, and has been introduced into the NIIMS. Any further development should ensure that all-hazard procedures are further defined and included in the systems documentation. Efforts should be made to extend these proven systems to other public safety services as the foundation of a uniform and comprehensive emergency management system.”

“As originally chartered, The FIRESCOPE Program mission was to “Make a quantum jump in the capability of Southern California wildland fire protection agencies to effectively coordinate inter agency action and to allocate suppression resources in dynamic multiple fire situations.”

“Southern California fire agencies are faced with a wide range of potentially hazardous situations which require effective and coordinated incident management. In addition to the ever-present annual wildland fires, there are winter floods, hazardous chemical situations, major high-rise conflagrations, harbor/refinery incidents, major aircraft crashes, and the increasing danger of major earthquakes.”

“While each of these situations will be tactically handled somewhat differently, the overall incident management approach will still utilize the five major functions which are a part of the Incident Command System. Similarly, each of these other situations may require a multi agency response, and thus impose the need for a Multi-Agency Coordination System.”

“The Incident Command System has thus far been developed to meet the need seen within the original mission. The system is now well documented in that regard, has been tested and is now being implemented. The agencies, of course, desire a single incident management system which can be applied on an all-hazards basis.”

“The first steps have been taken to accomplish this broadening of the application of the Incident Command System by the work done in developing the National Inter-Agency Incident Management System (NIIMS). By introducing relatively minor terminology, organizational and procedural modifications, the Incident Command System part of NIIMS is now better equipped for adaptation to an all-hazards environment.”

“Further development activity should now aim at ensuring that the procedures applicable to other hazards are well documented and made part of the system description.”

All of the information outlined above, came from the following three sources, and is at least 19 years old:

- “FIRESCOPE – A RECORD OF SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS”, compiled by Bob Irwin on June 1, 1981
- “FIRESCOPE PROGRAM REPORT TEN YEARS OF RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLIMENTATION (1972-1982)”
- “NIIMS – THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW OF NIIMS”, dated February 1983

March 26, 2003 CA-OES